

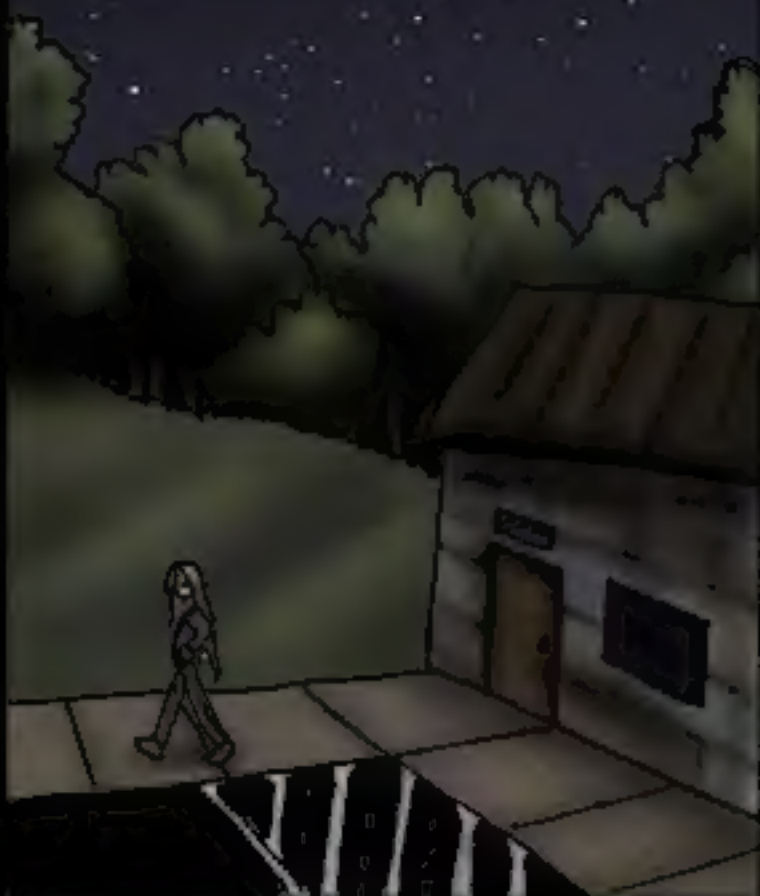
ELDRITCH

Story and Art by Shanna "Nash" Garrity





I'M A CITY GIRL.



SO, IT'S NEAT TO SEE
SO MANY STARS, AND
THE FOREST.

TO BE HONEST, I'D
NEVER REALLY BEEN AN
"OUTDOORS-Y" PERSON.
I'D REALLY WANTED TO
BE ONCE... BUT MOM
FROWNED ON IT,
BECAUSE THE WILDS
WERE "DIRTY."

BUT... TECHNICALLY THE
FOREST WAS PART OF
CAMPUS. SO IT
DOESN'T REALLY COUNT.



...RIGHT?



THERE'S SOMETHING
ABOUT KNOWING
THAT THE UNKNOWN
IS BEHIND YOU THAT
REALLY MAKES YOU
LESS WORRIED ABOUT
WHAT LIES AHEAD.

SNAP!

H-HELLO?

IS ANYONE
THERE?

THEN AGAIN.
MAYBE IT'S
NOTHING. LIKE
A RABBIT. OR A
SQUIRREL.

YEAH. THAT'S
GOTTA BE IT.

CRACK

PFFFFFFT!

LIKE ANYONE
WOULD ANSWER.
HA!





OH GOD, WHY WON'T IT STOP?! --EVERY TIME I TRY TO GET UP, IT PINS ME ON MY BACK AGAIN! WHY?! --OH GOD I'M BLEEDING! --THIS ISN'T REAL! IT CAN'T BE! --MONSTERS DON'T EXIST! --OH GOD GET IT OFF GET IT OFF GET IT OFF! --IT'S GOTTA BE SOMETHING ELSE!



IT'S... A BEAR!



I'M HURT. I KNOW I'M HURT.
BUT I... DON'T FEEL IT ANYMORE.
MOSTLY I JUST FEEL... FLOATY.

AND COLD.

IS THAT IMPORTANT?

IT'S SO DARK...

IT... DOESN'T MEAN
I'M DYING, DOES IT?

OH GOD, I THINK
I'M DYING!

WHY DID I GO INTO THE WOODS?
MAULED BY A BEAR. WITH MY LUCK
I'LL END UP AS A DARWIN AWARD.

OH... OH GOD. I DIDN'T CALL MOM.
I WAS GONNA CALL HER AFTER I
GOT BACK FROM EXPLORING! I...
I DIDN'T GET TO TELL HER I LOVE
HER, OR SAY GOODBYE.

I... I DON'T WANNA DIE. I CAN'T DIE!
BUT... WHAT IF IT'S JUST MY TIME? COULD IT BE?

NOT YET.



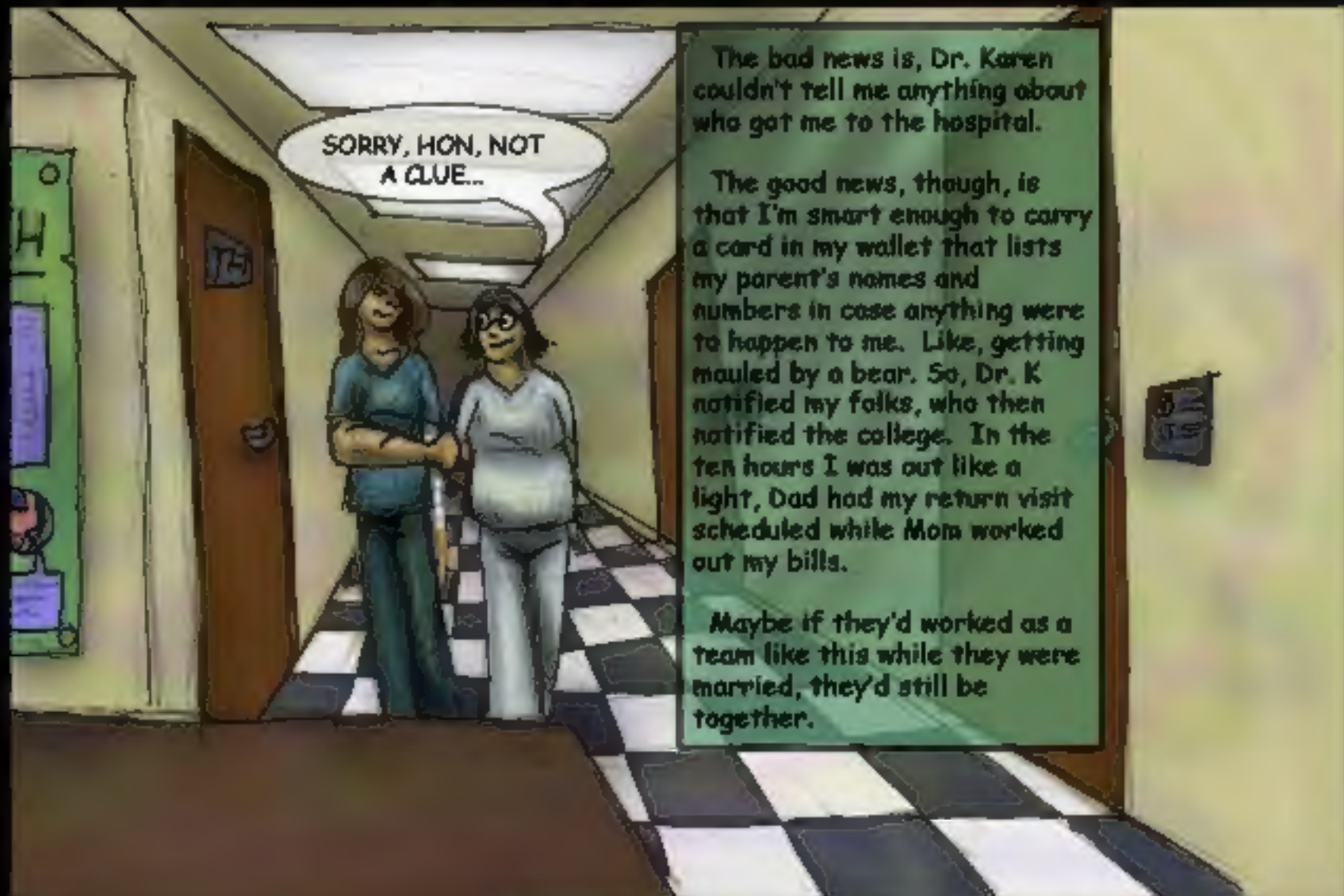
DID YOU KNOW? SHE WAS FOUND WITH WITCH HAZEL LEAVES IN HER HAIR? MADE INTO A POULTICE THEY MAKE A POWERFUL ASTRINGENT—

DR. K? MAYBE WE SHOULD CHECK ON SOME OF OUR OTHER PATIENTS... YOU KNOW, THE ONES WHO ARE AWAKE?

NO, THIS ONE INTERESTS ME AND...
OOH LOOK! THINK SHE MAY BE COMING AROUND!

NNNNGGHH...





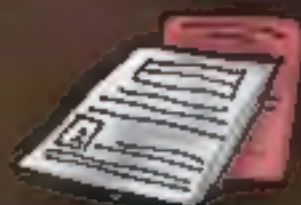
The bad news is, Dr. Karen couldn't tell me anything about who got me to the hospital.

The good news, though, is that I'm smart enough to carry a card in my wallet that lists my parent's names and numbers in case anything were to happen to me. Like, getting mauled by a bear. So, Dr. K notified my folks, who then notified the college. In the ten hours I was out like a light, Dad had my return visit scheduled while Mom worked out my bills.

Maybe if they'd worked as a team like this while they were married, they'd still be together.

I have to say, Dr K was a bit of a kook, but knew her stuff. She gave me all sorts of treatment options, dietary advice (even vegetarian stuff, yuck) and care sheets for changing my own bandages.

The best part was that when she saw I was handling the pain okay, she took Vicoden off of my prescription and gave me a gentler painkiller. Which was okay by me; I didn't need to be tripping in class.



CLINIC

Regardless, I couldn't get checked out of the hospital fast enough. There were too many people in there, and I prefer to be alone.



So, an empty bus on the ride back to school was just what the doctor ordered.





In spite of the crowded hallways and busy schedules... there's something I like about College: There's so many things to learn, and, in spite of my love of solitude, there's a lot the other students have to offer.

HEY, WATCH IT!

OW!!

PARDON ME!
MY UTMOST APOLOGIES!

Chemistry, Business, Art, we all have our passions... I was sure that there were so many people I could learn with and learn from...

GRUMBLE
THEATER
MAJORS

GRGRGRRR

RAWR!

NUUUUU, DON'T
EAT MEH-EH-EH!

...And then, there was Maggie



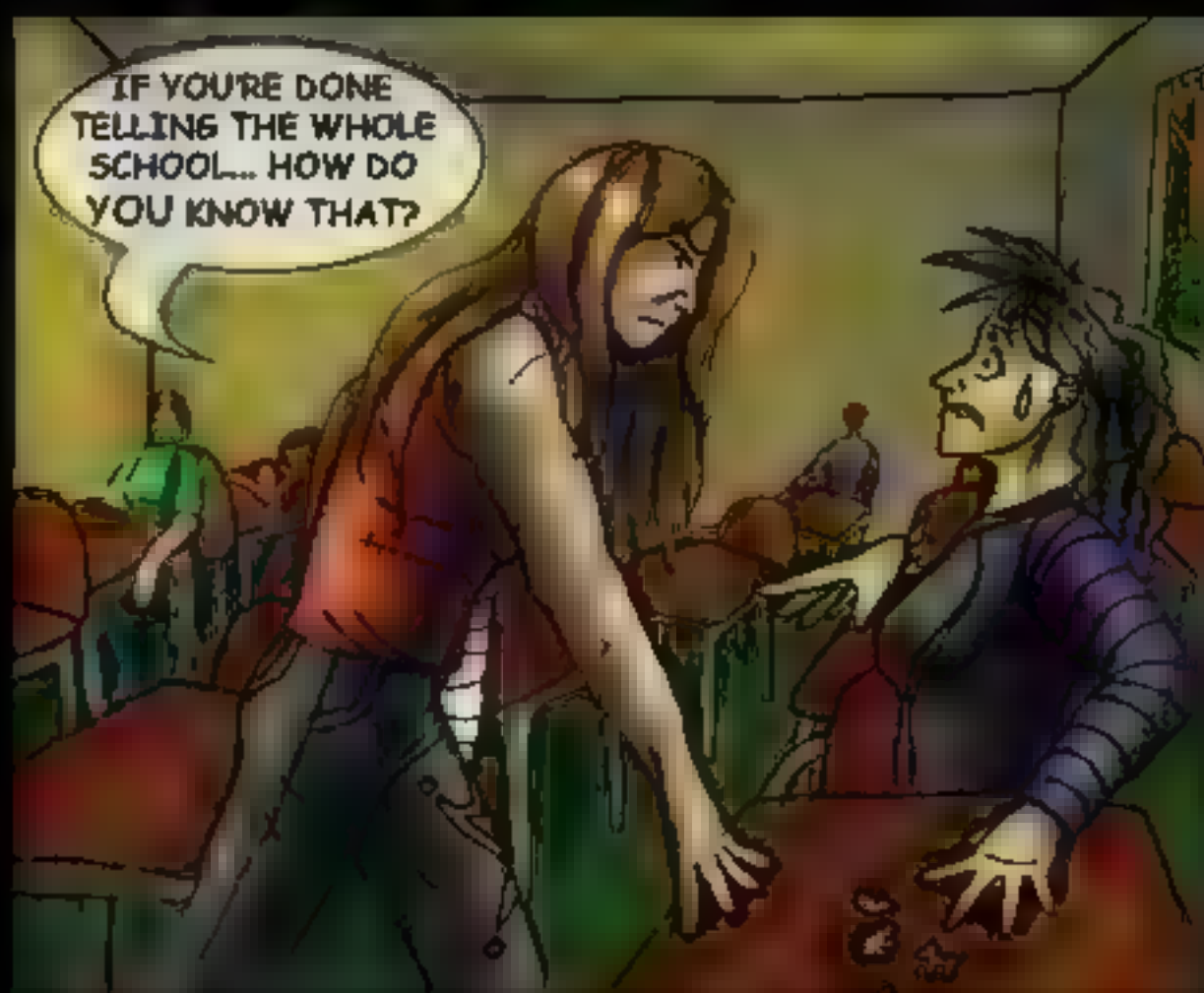
HOMIGAWD,
IT'S YOU!



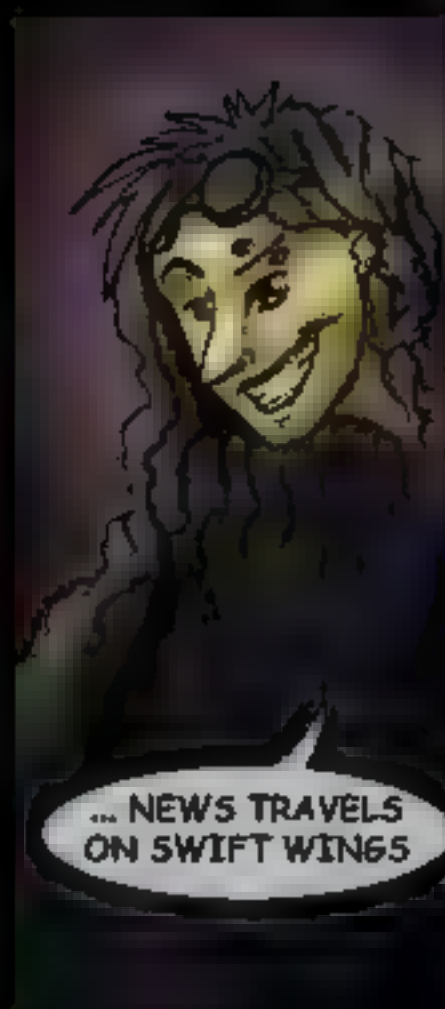
ATTACKED BY A
FEROCIOUS BEAST— OUT
IN THIS SCHOOL'S VERY
OWN WOODS!

THE GIRL WHO WAS
SAVAGELY MAULED

ONLY TO BE
MYSTERIOUSLY
ABANDONED OUTSIDE A
LOCAL HOSPITAL...



IF YOU'RE DONE
TELLING THE WHOLE
SCHOOL... HOW DO
YOU KNOW THAT?



... NEWS TRAVELS
ON SWIFT WINGS

I thought class would never end...



Especially with Maggie staring at me like I was some kind of circus freak.



So, of course she managed to catch up with me after class.

HEY FAITH! I WAS THINKING, MAYBE YOU'D LIKE TO GRAB SOME 'DEW AND HANG OUT FOR A WHILE...



UM... NO, SORRY, I DON'T THINK SO.

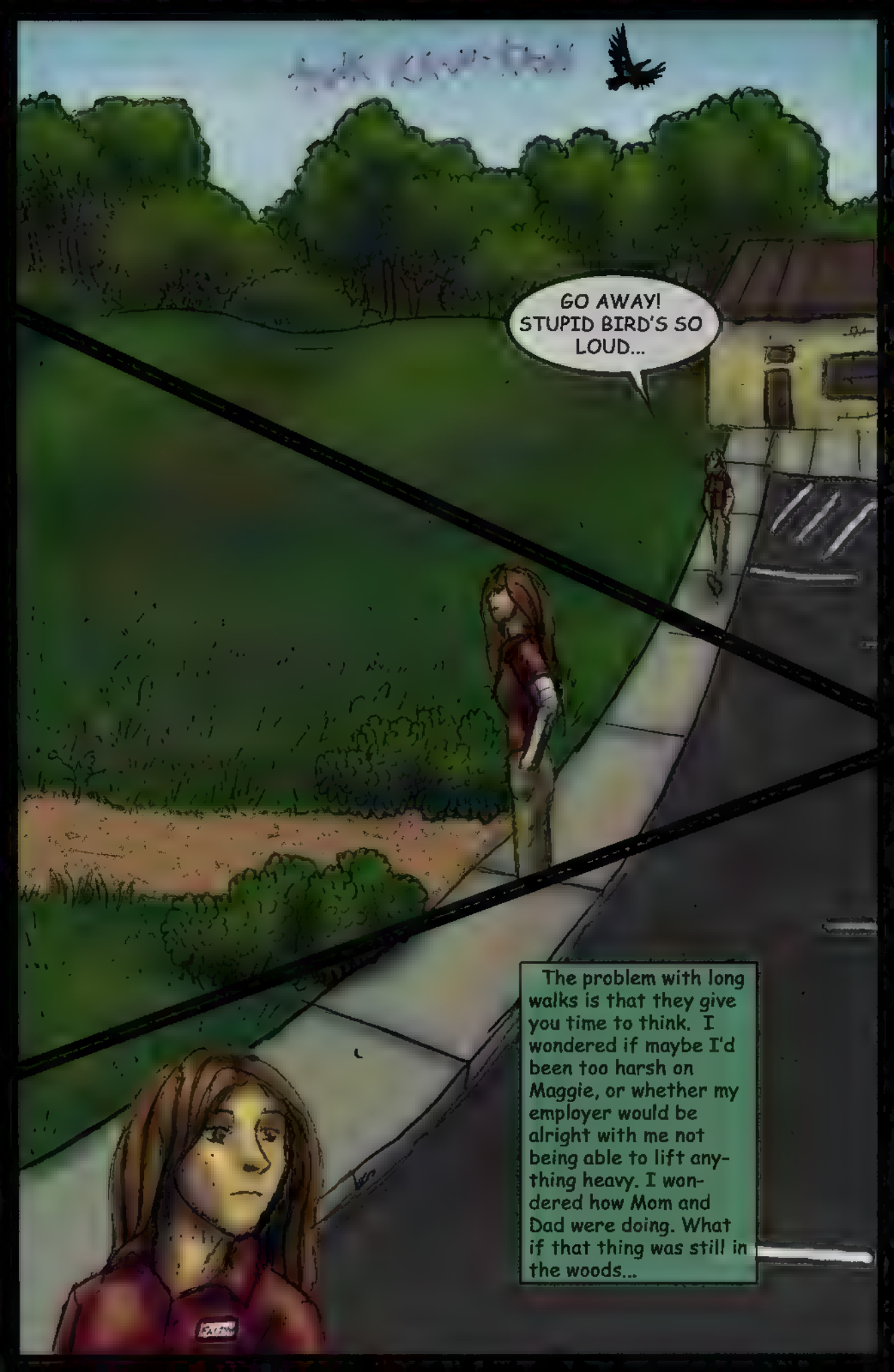
AWW, WHY NOOOT?

BECAUSE I PAY MY OWN TUITION. I HAVE A JOB TO GO TO



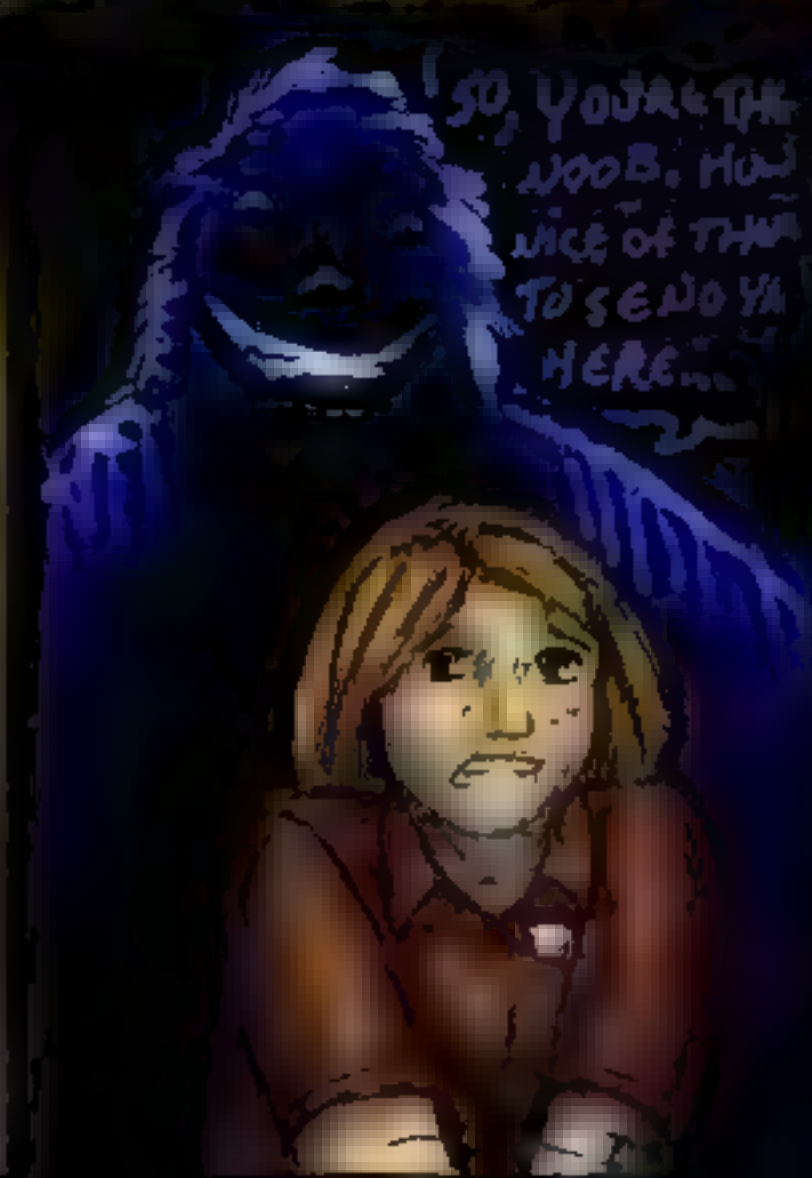
AND I REALIZE I'M IN COLLEGE, AND AM TOO OLD TO PLAY WITH ANIMAL CRACKERS.





GO AWAY!
STUPID BIRD'S SO
LOUD...

The problem with long walks is that they give you time to think. I wondered if maybe I'd been too harsh on Maggie, or whether my employer would be alright with me not being able to lift anything heavy. I wondered how Mom and Dad were doing. What if that thing was still in the woods...





WELCOME TO THE BACKROOM
OTHERWISE KNOWN AS HELL!

LET'S GET YAH STARTED--
FOLDING AND HANGING CLOTHES



DON'T LET THAT ARM BOTHER YAH!
IT'S JUST A FLESH WOUND!

DO NOT TOUCH THE
HOUSEWARES... BUT BE CAREFUL!



WE'LL GETCHA'
USED TO THIS
OR MY NAME
AIN'T JAY!



NOT BAD, NOOB!
YOU MAY GET USED TO THIS
NEW JOB OF YOURS YET!
TOMORROW WE'LL GET SOME
REAL WORK DONE!



SEPT 3



THAT IS OBVIOUSLY
A YELLOW-WHITE
YOU HAVE AN ORANGE
WHITE

No, I DON'T NEED TO COME
IN. I'M ALL HEALED UP!
YOU GUYS DID GREAT! I
CAN EVEN LIFT HEAVY BOXES
AT WORK AND--
YOU WERE LIFTING
BOXES WITH
YOUR STICHES
IN 'EM



*68/11



REHORKKTH!

SEPT 24



ALOM? I'M SICK
AND COLLEGE SUCKS
AND WORK IS HARD
AND I MISS YOU.



For the first time in a week, I didn't wake up feeling sick. I'd already missed a lot of lessons and after a week of fever and nausea, I actually looked forward to class.

I thought that if I took a new seat at the back of the class, everyone would leave me alone

No such luck



HEY UM.. I SAW YOU THROWING STONES THE OTHER DAY YOU UM.. YOU SHOULDN'T THROW THEM AT ANIMALS BECAUSE THEY

MAGGIE THEY'RE JUST SOME DUMB BIRDS AND STUFF THEY'RE ONLY ANIMALS.

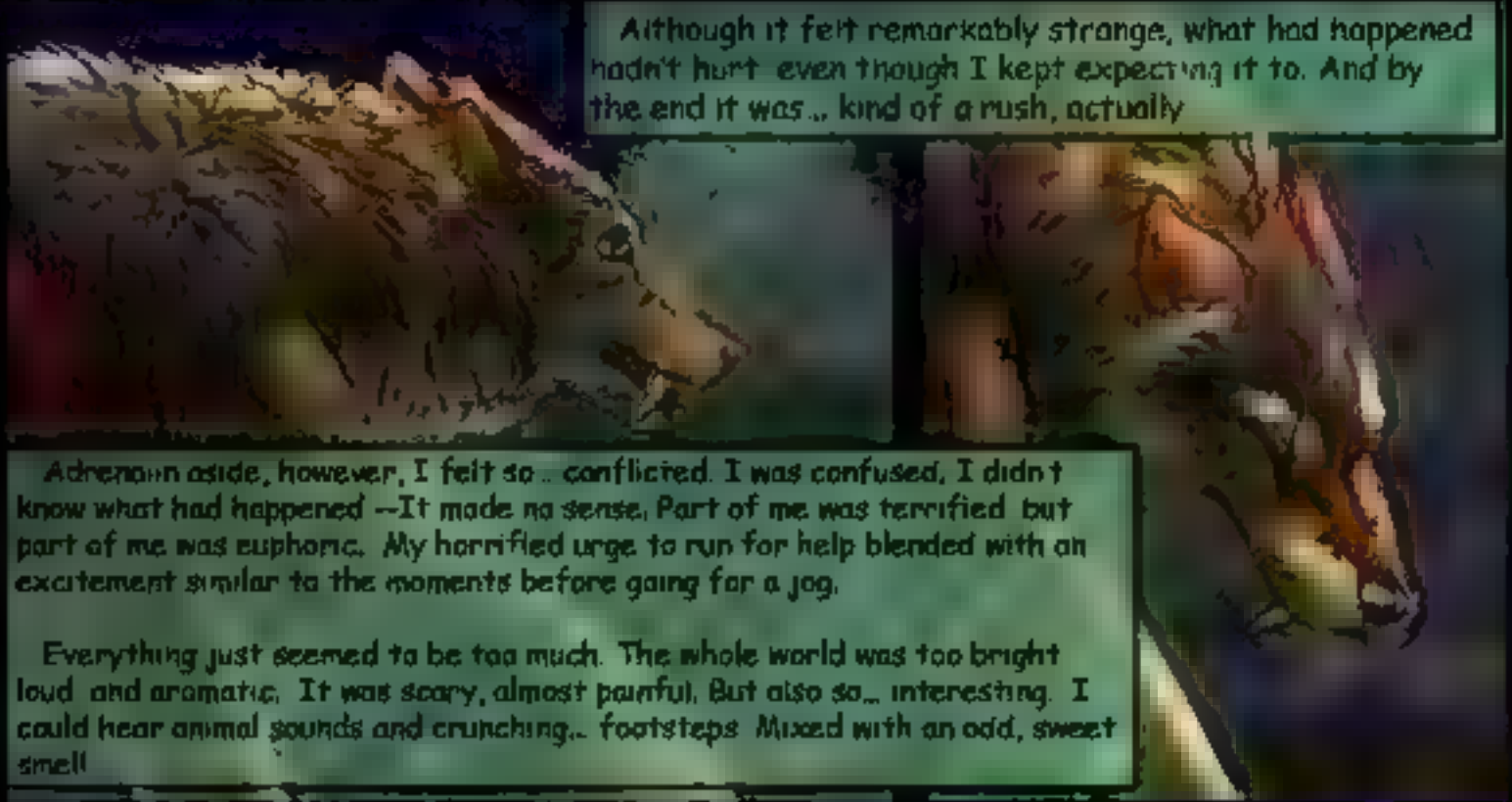
LOOK. I'M GOING FOR A WALK. SO LEAVE ME ALONE. DON'T WORRY I WON'T HURT ANY BIRDS



After a while.. I wondered if such a long walk was a good idea. I started feeling so strange



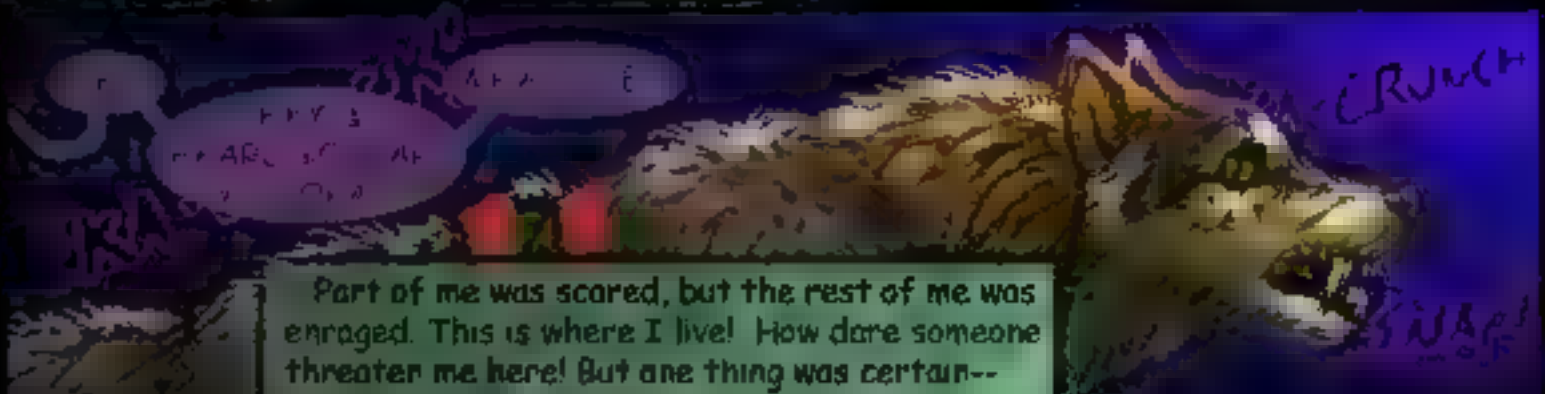




Although it felt remarkably strange, what had happened hadn't hurt even though I kept expecting it to. And by the end it was .. kind of a rush, actually

Adrenalin aside, however, I felt so .. conflicted. I was confused, I didn't know what had happened --It made no sense. Part of me was terrified but part of me was euphoric. My horrified urge to run for help blended with an excitement similar to the moments before going for a jog.

Everything just seemed to be too much. The whole world was too bright loud and aromatic. It was scary, almost painful. But also so.. interesting. I could hear animal sounds and crunching.. footsteps Mixed with an odd, sweet smell



I wasn't going to be taken by surprise again!

This wasn't right..

A... A WEREWOLF??

GRIRRI

THAT IS SO

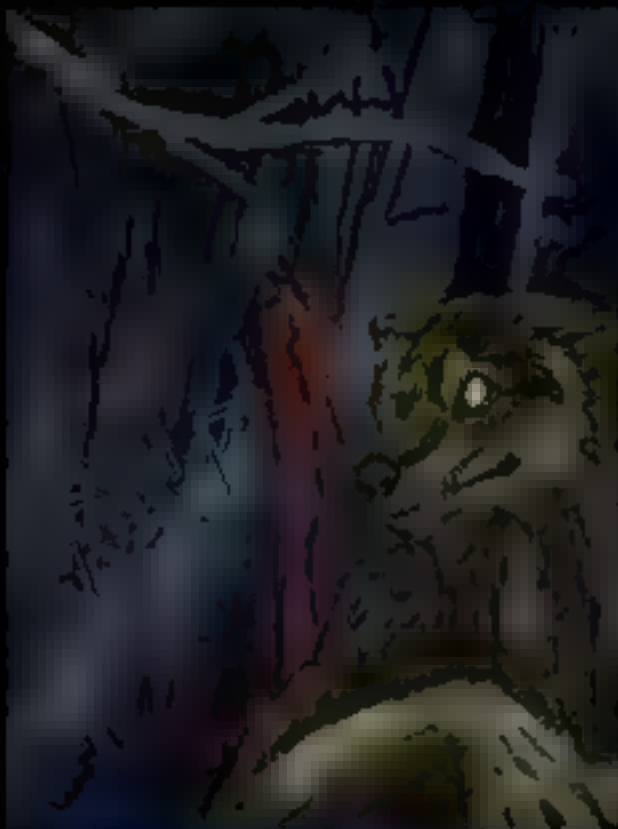
SO

COOL!

Did nothing make
sense anymore?

WAIT!
COME BACK!

I just couldn't handle it all.
I... I had expected that
THING I'd met before. But
instead it was Maggie and,
did she say a werewolf? I
something was wrong with me
but werewolves didn't exist
They couldn't!



I tried not to look at myself



Or think about how I was running but



To see my reflection.

Thirst nagged at me but when I came to the water, I found I was so very unprepared.

I was so tired, and so hungry. My mind was reeling, but after what felt like hours of running, I just couldn't continue.



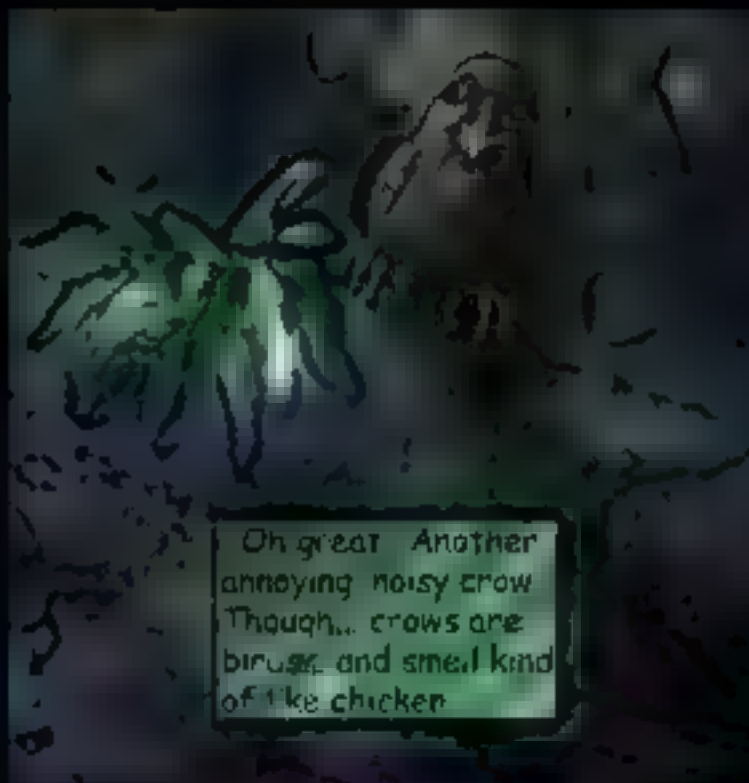
Gr > R > G > NOOOOO!!!



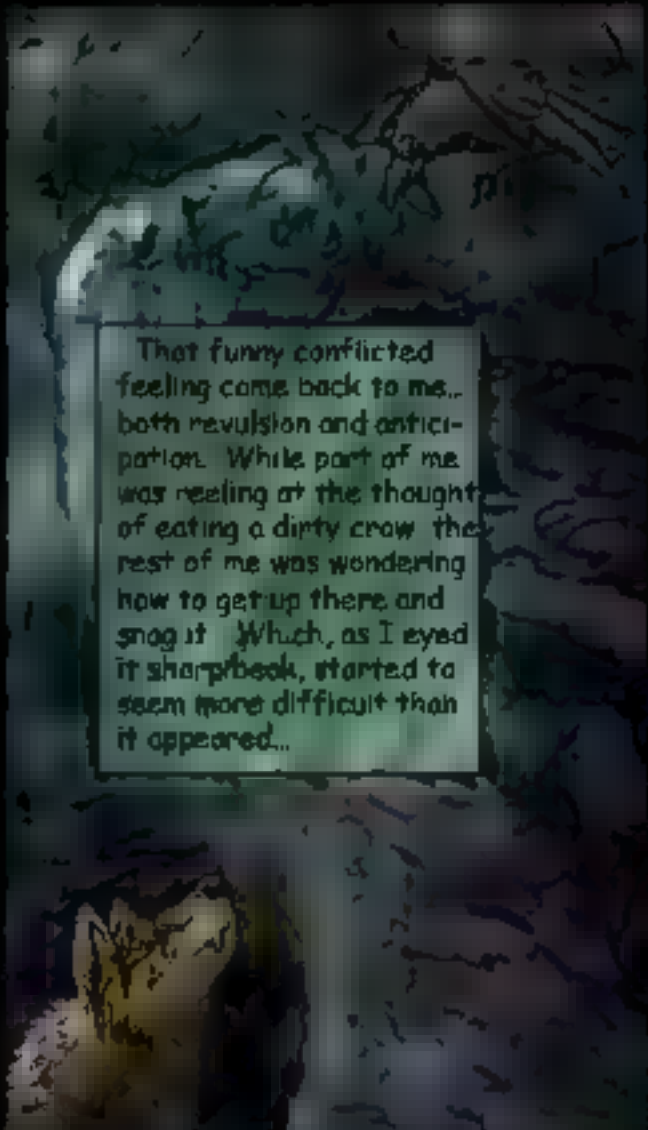
My mind needed trying to make sense of what was going on. I knew there were no such things as werewolves. So there had to be a better explanation.

It was odd that Maggie seemed okay with this that didn't make sense. Maybe I was dreaming? No, it felt too real. Maybe someone had slipped something into my food? Some sort of hallucinogenic? No, no one would do that.

But the bigger question was "What was I to do now?"



Oh great. Another annoying noisy crow. Though... crows are birds, and smell kind of like chicken.



That funny conflicted feeling came back to me... both revulsion and anticipation. While part of me was reeling at the thought of eating a dirty crow the rest of me was wondering how to get up there and snag it. Which, as I eyed it sharpbeak, started to seem more difficult than it appeared...

KHAAAW!

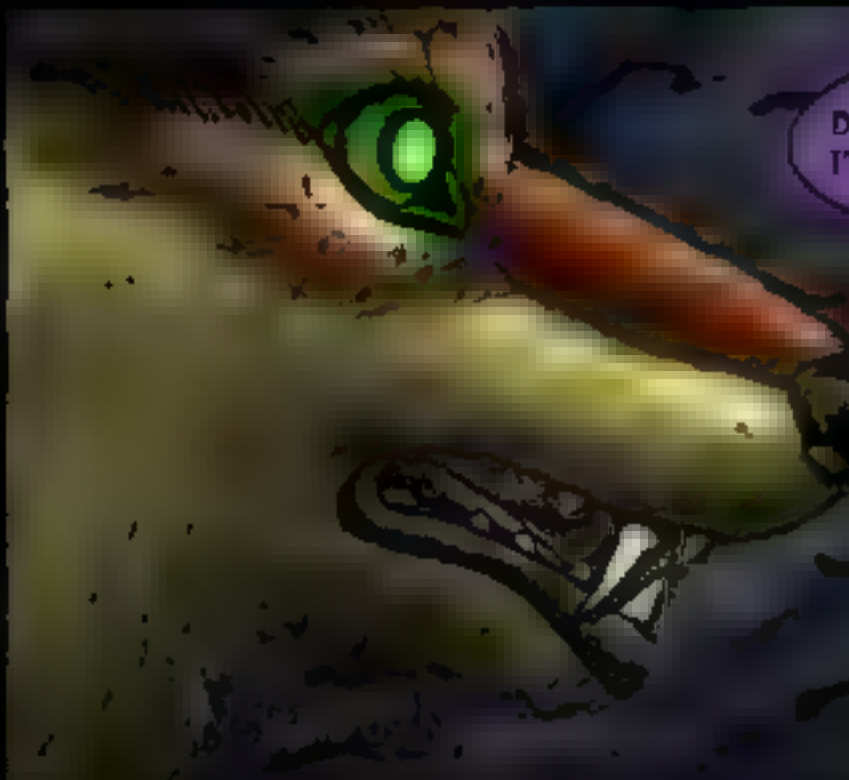
AUGH!

That's me. Nerves of steel.



WELL PEEEEEY
LOOKIT YOU!

It. It+ TALKS? Yeesh. No that's not creepstastic at ALL.



WHY SO QUIET?
DONT YOU RECOGNIZE ME?
I'VE ONLY BEEN PESTERING
YOU FOR WEEKS.

Pestering? But aside from the crows, the only annoying thing  been... Oh crap, anyone but that crackpot Maggie. Though her showing up made the possibility of this being a dream more plausible...

Because this had just become a nightmare.

...MAGGIE?

Sounding out the word was so hard... and was that MY voice? It sounded like a belligerent lawn mower.

THAT'S ME!
YOUR FRIENDLY
NEIGHBORHOOD
CROWTENGU!

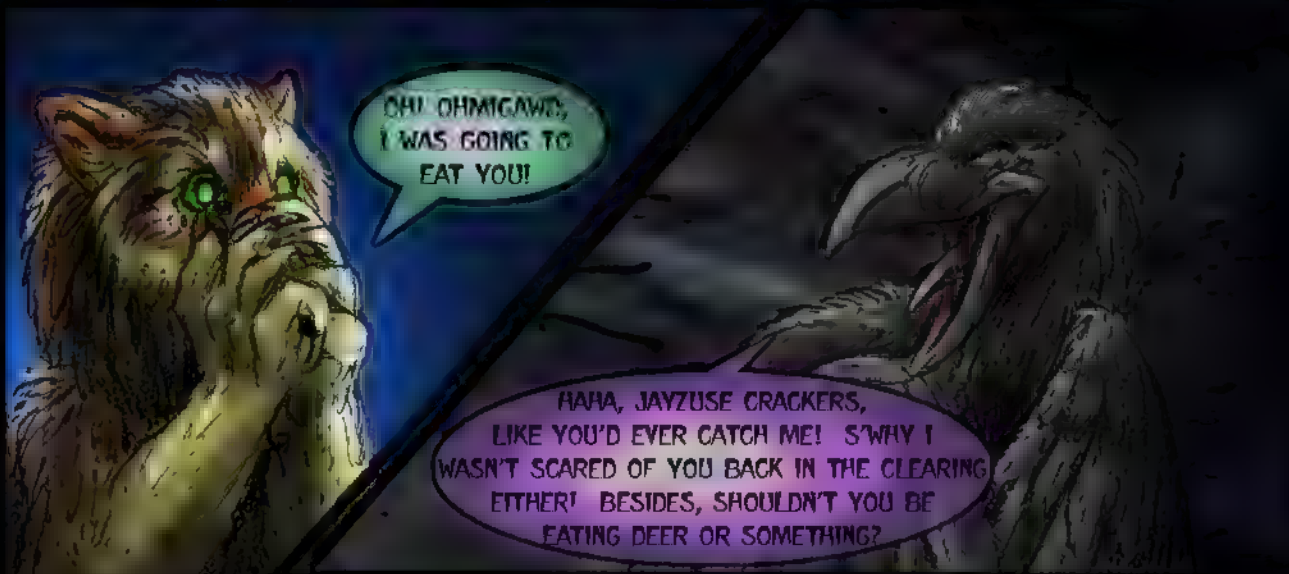
WHAT ARRREE
YOU DO-ING, FOL-LOWING
ME ARRROUND?

I DUNNO... THE "HELP
ME, HELP ME" JUST CAUGHT
MY ATTENTION!



OOOOHHH.

Well... I supposed it was
probably a good thing I
hadn't...

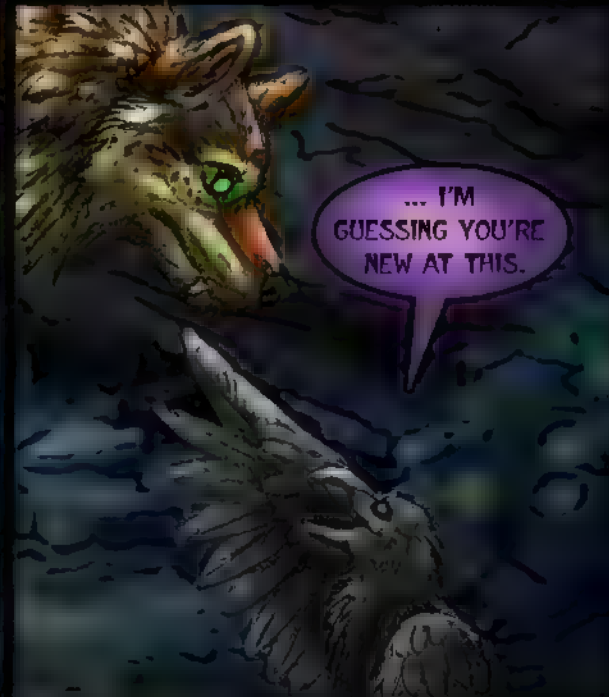


OH! OHMIGAWD,
I WAS GOING TO
EAT YOU!

Haha, jayzuse crackers,
like you'd ever catch me! S'why I
wasn't scared of you back in the clearing
either! Besides, shouldn't you be
eating deer or something?



EAT BAMBI??
EWW, THAT'S SO
GROSS!



... I'M
GUESSING YOU'RE
NEW AT THIS.



NO, I DO THIS
EVERY NIGHT...



OOOH, OKIE DOKE!

SO, WHERE'S THE OTHER
WEREWOLVES THEN?



... WAIT, WHAT?



OTHER
WEREWOLVES!



YOU GUYS RUN
IN PACKS, I HEAR

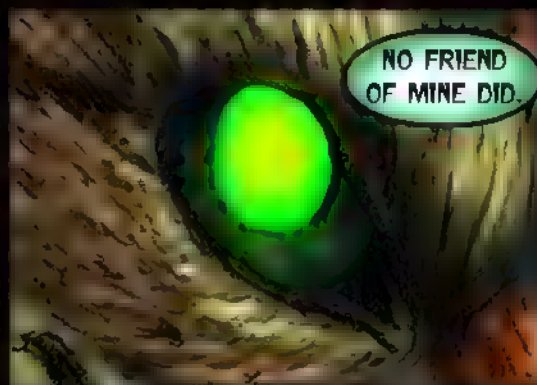


LYCANTHOPY RUNS
IN THE FAMILY?

ER, NO?

...BIT?

THEN A FRIEND
BIT YOU?



NO FRIEND
OF MINE DID.



HEY THERE
WHY ARE--



GROWL...



THAT'S IT.



I'M GOING TO GO GET
A BURGER OR SOMETHING...

LOOKING
LIKE THAT?!?



LOOK. I'M REALLY, REALLY
HUNGRY. AND I DON'T WANT BAMBI,
I WANT REAL FOOD.



YOU KNOW... I MAY
HAVE AN IDEA...

Turns out...
it was a pretty
simple plan.

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU FOUND
MY KEY AMONGST WHAT'S LEFT
OF MY CLOTHES SO FAST...

I'M A CROW! I'M GOOD
AT FINDING SHINY STUFF!
NOW, JUST REMEMBER



WAIT FOR
THE SIGNAL!

CHI-CHIRP



CHI-CHIRP

KAW!



Sure, this was proba-
bly a dream. There
was no other good
explanation. Thus,
what happened proba-
bly didn't matter. Yet
in spite of myself, I
really, really hoped
Maggie's signal was
right and that the
coast was clear...



By some miracle... it was.

HURRY, BEFORE SOMEONE SEES YOU!



THAT WENT SURPRISINGLY SMOOTHLY...



AND, AS PROMISED, FOOD! MY ENERGY BAR STASH!

That sure did explain how she could be so freakin' annoyingly hyper.



SEE? EASY. I GUESS SOMEONE MUST BE LOOKING AFTER YOU!

OMNOMNOM...



COUGH-HACK!

WHAT?! YOU'VE GOTTA BE KIDDING ME!



I MEAN, JUST LOOK AT ME!



I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE SMOKING, BUT IT'S PRETTY OBVIOUS THAT NO ONE'S LOOKING AFTER ME.

NO ONE AT ALL.



NO ONE? HM. FUNNY... FOR SOMEONE NAMED FAITH, YOU SURE DON'T SEEM TO HAVE ANY.



SLAM!

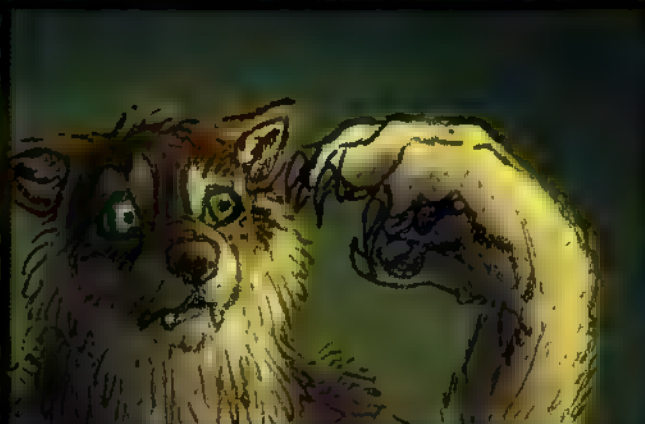
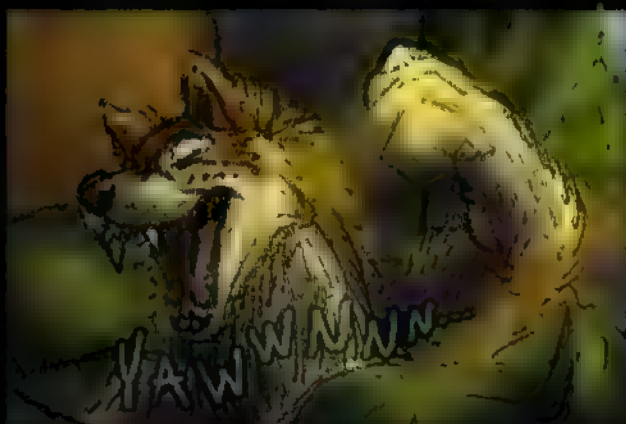


FAITH. HMPH. NOT LIKE I CHOSE MY NAME. WHAT A JOKE.

It didn't matter. It was all just a dream anyway...

Worst. Night's. Sleep. Ever.
You know it's been a rough
one when those are your first
waking thoughts.

My stomach was queasy, and
my mind was a haze, telling me I
had the weirdest dreams... of
being a wolf, and Maggie was a
crow...





It... it couldn't be! I didn't know much about werewolves, but I knew I was supposed to change back during the day! That's how it worked in the movie I saw! I... I didn't want to be like this forever! I wanted to do human things! I wanted to go to class, and visit my family and... and...

And I wanted fingers. Something I could do art more easily with. And to see without a big fat muzzle in my way.



I wanted to have skin without fur sticking out of it. I wanted the sensation of being human, not this... this thing.



If I thought about it hard enough... I could almost sense how it felt...



OH MAN!

IF... IF I TRY..!



PANT...

PANT...



RR'!!
NNG
L



HELLO? JAY?

... JAY, I'M GLAD YOU CALLED.
I... I CAN'T COME IN.

I DON'T JUST FEEL
MYSELF TODAY.

... NO, "DR. HOUSE,"
IT'S NOT LUPUS.

I'LL BE IN WHEN I FEEL BETTER.
...KAY. BYE.





CHI-CHIRP

CHI-CHIRP!



I GUESS... I GUESS
I'M HUMAN TONIGHT.



MY LIFE
IS SO, SO
MESSED UP.
GOD, I...



LOOK, I KNOW WE
HAVEN'T TALKED SINCE MY
FOLKS SPLIT UP.

BUT... BUT MY LIFE'S GOTTEN
REALLY WEIRD... AND I THINK I'VE
SCREWED THINGS UP WITH THE ONE
PERSON WHO CAN HELP ME.

AND I HAVE NO ONE
ELSE TO TALK TO...

